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THE ORGANIZATION OF HIGH SCHOOL WORK IN SPANISH

(Paper read at the Modern Language Conference in Portland, Oregon, July 12, 1917.)

I am going to speak about short specialized courses as a feature in the organization of high school work in Spanish,—meaning by short specialized courses not fewer periods for Spanish nor necessarily new lines of work, but a different grouping of periods, a *separate articulation* of certain portions of our work with other portions.

Thoroughness in fundamental work and high scholarship in advanced work are worthy aims; and in modern language work these aims are not advanced by a uniform series of four or five period per week classes because such classes do not permit satisfactory individual and group adjustments. Series of four or five period per week classes foster mediocrity and if they achieve thoroughness and high scholarship, do so only with extravagant expenditure of time of both teacher and pupil. This is my conclusion after several years of experience in handling a four-year course in Spanish.

On the other hand, I have found that shorter courses directed toward definite educational and vocational ends are, so far as I have been able in my special conditions to try them, conducive to better and higher types of work for the following reasons:

- First. By permitting more rapid promotion of exceptional pupils, they relieve congestion in lower classes and fill the smaller upper ones. (By exceptional pupils I mean those recommended in two years of foreign language work and those others that, quick of eye, keen of ear and alive to sentence structure, show marked superiority in their first term of Spanish.)
- Second. They admit adjustments for intensive work on fundamentals as an alternative for wide reading, thus meeting the needs of weak pupils.
- Third. They make it possible to stress vocational work without sacrificing high scholarship.
- Fourth. They can bring more of Spanish and Spanish-American life, literature, and history into first- and second-year courses.

Examples of subjects for specialized courses are the following: practice in speaking; easy oral work on verbs; slow reading; rapid reading; elementary composition; advanced composition; Spanish-

American words, customs and holidays; how to learn a second foreign language; and (this principally for prospective normal students in their last year of high school) how to present English to foreigners. How such specialized courses may yield the advantages stated, I shall try to show by describing a few that I have at different times more or less fully tested. These courses are not cited as having in themselves any particular merit but merely as examples of separately articulating work.

Two first-term classes may be mentioned, a one period per week practice class in speaking for all beginners and a class in elementary Spanish with three recitations per week, one of these being with the practice class.

The practice class is intended to give background and an everyday concrete vocabulary. I shall call it a *poster class* because in it the pupils acquire a considerable vocabulary of words and phrases by talking about a hundred or more large colored posters and display cards—cards about sun-kist oranges and raisins, irrigated farms, safety razors, and recently, the Red Cross and “Men Wanted in the Army”; but they also learn here Spanish songs and declamations with the aid of our victrola. This poster class is a side line of work paralleling and supplementing the regular speaking and writing but bringing in an element of novelty and planned to emphasize or teach definite grammatical principles.

The three lesson per week class is beginners’ Spanish mainly for pupils recommended in two years of a foreign language and introduces short cuts not practical with untrained pupils. This reduction of five recitations (the other section has five) to three is an advantage to upper-class pupils whose time is limited. I shall say more of short cuts later.

The language teacher’s position of advantage for shaping upper classes is in the second and third terms. In the second term, mastery of the modes and tenses and quick recognition of verb phrases have become essential. Weak pupils find this a difficult task, but capable ones, who at this point assimilate verbs rapidly, shoot quickly ahead. We should make the most of this fact, advancing the latter and allowing the others to make haste slowly.

Two courses, beginning in the second term and continuing through the third, I have found successful for this purpose: namely, elementary composition, one or two periods (depending on the

ability of the individual pupil) for oral practice on the use of the modes and tenses and pronouns, and the other a story-telling class, two periods, applying the verb study just mentioned to the reproduction of very brief anecdotes and fables. Exceptional pupils readily omit all, or nearly all, of the first half of these courses.

The device is fruitful. We avoid congestion in the second term. We gain time at the psychological moment to help the weakest pupils on, what is to them, the most difficult work. Fewer pupils fail and these usually only in part of the term's work. The oral composition is an ever-ready coaching class for any that need aid later. The upper classes are benefited. Small third, fourth, and fifth term classes are filled and the teacher's time is not unnecessarily expended on disproportionately small groups. Bright boys and girls forge ahead, increasing in advanced classes the percentage of capable and scholarly workers. These pupils, ready of speech, engaging in personality, getting color from all they read and hear and reflecting it on their classmates,—these are a wonderful resource in modern language work. These pupils raise the level of all the work we carry on; in fact, if they remain into the third and fourth years, they make it possible to offer entirely different and higher types of work. In any class they are, like the "mujer chiquitita," a delight; but they are real blessings when we place them where they can be of greatest service to themselves, their fellow pupils and, in so doing, to us.

There are other advantages, lesser, perhaps, but not unworthy of consideration, gained from rapid promotion. Many highly satisfactory students, somewhat like Dick Swiveller's dear gazelle, leave after the second, indeed not a few after the first year. These with the opportunity of rapid advancement cover more ground and get more of the spirit of the language and the people. Again, the elementary courses, being shorter, are more numerous and accordingly offer greater freedom in program adjustment. This opens the way for fourth-year students to lay the foundation for a second or third foreign language.

So much for rapid promotion. What of thoroughness for slow pupils? We have seen one way of providing careful first-year work for less satisfactory but diligent pupils. What of the second and third years? For such pupils, most novels are mere wildernesses of solid print, with never a phrase in full-face type anywhere—scarcely

even a proper name to cheer the eye or fire the imagination. Is it wise to require wide reading from them? And if not, what should these pupils study in the fourth and fifth terms?

Do not short articulating courses offer a solution? Without interfering with rapid reading courses for other pupils, would they not afford opportunities for various combinations of suitable work for plodders, and for those whose interests have become centered, temporarily at least, on purely vocational ends—combinations having in view speaking and hearing, intensive study of fewer pages, and letter-perfect work in some fundamental verb course, with the possibility of retrieving recommendations lost in preceding terms?

Correspondence may be mentioned in this connection as one subject especially suited for intensive work. It calls for emphasis on the phraseology of Spanish letters and legal papers and on corresponding good English usages as a matter of course. But aside from this it is valuable material for translating and study. It approximates conversation, it is not difficult, and its immediate vocational end makes a strong appeal to the pupil,—a telling advantage when one has occasion to pin him down to exact meanings. Misinterpreting a passage—bearing false witness, so to speak, against the author—takes on a new aspect when business reliability is in question. I sometimes wonder if we bear sufficiently in mind the value of translation for teaching fidelity to truth.

I must pass over minor adjustments that may be made with short articulating courses to speak of another point. How may they bring more of the life of Spain and Spanish-America into the first two years? It is not possible to require extensive reading here. How may we get some of the fruits of extensive reading?

I try to accomplish this in weekly practice classes. The poster and song class just mentioned is one of a series of one period a week classes, running from the first through the third or even the fourth year, and aiming to bring more speaking and Spanish life into the department as a whole. Like the "movies," they may be said to offer *features*. They give graded practice in speaking. Pupils may elect two of these courses simultaneously with other work, or even one, merely for practice, and nothing else in Spanish when discontinuing the language as a regular subject.

Spanish newspapers and advertising magazines, the Red Cross First Aid Book (Spanish edition), the Bulletin of the Pan-American

Union, who's who in Latin American history (not long, full accounts, but enough for a nucleus to encourage further reading), folk-lore, topical monthly reviews of stories read in other classes,—oral reports on all these find a place here. Not all of course are used in a single term. One magazine or newspaper, for example, may furnish study for five or six weeks. (In using magazines or newspapers, a particular issue is selected and each pupil is provided with his own copy so that regular and careful preparation may be made.)

These are foraging classes, classes for browsing, classes for an elementary science vocabulary for the embryo investigator, a place for short cuts to a full vocabulary, a place to shine. Here each may follow his own bent far afield and bring back booty to exhibit in more or less (usually less) perfect Castilian to admiring freshmen or tolerant seniors—for the work dealing with material of a general nature, the prerequisites for any particular section are not specific, formal preparation but ability to appreciate, to hear understandingly and, within limits, to reproduce what is heard. The groups are therefore composite. All grades may meet to find an audience for their own work or be stirred to emulate the success of others; and each pupil brings what within assigned limits he chooses to gather.

Here in suitable sequence may enter occasional talks—in Spanish of course—by the teacher or by upper-class students on such topics as corrupt pronunciations; the intelligent attitude toward pronunciations used in Spanish America with demonstrations of these pronunciations; and Spanish American words, customs and holidays. In these weekly practice classes the young student should hear ballads, character sketches and stories from standard Spanish novels and plays, excerpts from such masters of style and vocabulary as Cervantes, Quintana, and Valera—the best, in short, from all the classes.

Such material is sometimes taken in *clubs*, but its first place is in the *class*. The class has the best right to the best we have.

To sum up, weekly practice classes seem to me to bring the worth-while part of Spanish, the live things, within the reach of all at the earliest possible moment; and at the same time they encourage individual initiative and permit a variety of necessary or desirable program adjustments.

I have spoken of short, articulated courses of general application—courses that relieve congestion and build up higher classes while strengthening weak pupils, advancing exceptional ones, and giving flexibility to the program—and of other weekly classes that reach out into history, literature, and current events. Let me speak now of two important types of work desirable for capable students in their second, third or fourth year of high school.

First, shorter cuts to the mechanism of a second foreign language and to a full and practical vocabulary,—these are fruitful subjects for numbers of pupils and should not be left to haphazard treatment in ill-sorted classes.

How do you get the mechanism of a second or third language? Have you ever tried studying another language just to see how the problems look to pupils? How much faster can you absorb it than they do Spanish? Your short cuts should be allowed the pupil intelligent enough to use them. You focus on the subject from many angles. So should he.

Variety of word lists such as are found in *Spanish at a Glance*, early recognition of past and future forms, common irregular stems, the tricks of position of objective pronouns, clues in spelling,—these presented briefly, by one who knows, to the pupil that comes recommended in other foreign language work, there opens to him an infinite variety of easy reading matter from which to build a concrete vocabulary.

Flitting through the pages of little illustrated books on physiology, electricity, civics, and history, with the contents of which he is already familiar, he may, by a sort of Rosetta Stone method, gather many a common word; and he builds in this way no insecure vocabulary because he chooses his books according to his individual bent and finds his terms not in *figurative uses*, but in their *ordinary associations*. Brief excerpts without illustration in school readers are difficult and lifeless compared with the above and with magazines and newspapers in which the context and wealth of illustration are conclusive as to the application of terms.

Especially for prospective normal students in their fourth year of high school should there be provided an opportunity to learn how to use their knowledge of a foreign language. They should learn how and where if need be to get for themselves a little knowledge

of other languages and, perhaps also, how to apply such knowledge in presenting English to immigrants and the children of immigrants.

Secondly, there is in many textbooks a quantity of rich material that goes too often undeveloped until the time when it could have illuminated the work of our better pupils has passed; sometimes indeed it goes entirely unexplored. This happens because, in large and ill-sorted classes, other needs are more pressing and the knowledge necessary to appreciate such material is, in a majority of the pupils, lacking.

An example of such material is Ramsey's chapter on *Word-Making by Derivatives*. Such material makes for a full, rich knowledge of the language and accelerates pupils capable of advancement—and, if I may emphasize, no opportunity of encouraging merited promotion should be lost, if only to strengthen small upper classes and relieve congestion below.

In conclusion, let me repeat that I am urging not any courses referred to, but the needs these courses strive to satisfy.

The community pays for Spanish in the schools because it is desirable that a knowledge of things Spanish and Spanish-American help form the attitude of our growing boys and girls toward Spanish America, and because the community needs trained individuals to do specific things with Spanish. Our high school classes can achieve both ends if we do not blockade our capable and diligent pupils in unwieldy elementary classes or subject them all to the same lines of advanced work. We need a flexible program, taking into account individual and group needs and the credit value of thoroughness.

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